

MILE END WEST PROJECT

Progress Report for the Period

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Project Title:--

MELE END WEST PROJECT

1. Number 554-1-2
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3. Summary of previous years work plan.
 - 1) Establish a day care centre with emphasis on parent participation in administration and decision-making.
 - 2) Establish an overall Greek parents association.
 - 3) Increase contacts with tenants with the objective, the establishment of a tenant's association.
 - 4) Develop a group of Greek citizens to establish a Greek history and mythology program for elementary school children.
 - 5) A group of residents will study problems that exist in the medical services area.
 - 6) Develop consumer and legal education programs.
 - 7) Work with a group of citizens concerned with the lack of recreational space.
 - 8) Gather data on local employment conditions.
 - 9) Contact Greek regional associations to study Greek problem.
 - 10) Enlist support of sympathetic Greek professionals.
 - 11) Develop a Greek information and referral service.
 - 12) Establish programs with local schools that will give teachers a better understanding of the problems of the immigrant child.

4. Progress Made:

The Project has been successful in initiating a developmental process within the Greek immigrant community. However, the extent of this success can only be measured in relation to the hostility and mistrust that characterize this community. While the Project staff were well aware of this, its extent and the degree of alienation from the total society were far greater than had been anticipated.

Staff efforts have been directed to developing a Project identity in the community. This has required carefully planned actions that take into account the many potentially divisive forces that are in a large part the cause of the existing disunity.

The success of these efforts can be seen in the extent to which the Project is identified as an essential part of the community.

Discussions in the traditional meeting places, barber shops, pool rooms, restaurants, frequently revolve around some aspect of the Project. The increased use of the telephone information service (average 100 calls a week), The number of people who congregate at the offices of the Project, all indicate that the staff efforts have been effective.

While it is too soon to state that a unified community exists, the basic elements for its development are emerging. For that group of people who are closest to the Project, a re-definition of themselves in relation to the total society is discernible. This re-definition involved a realistic statement of life goals and a clearer view of themselves vis a vis Quebec and Canadian society. It involves recognition of a "ghetto" existence and a desire to move away from its negative and restrictive aspects.

Specific progress in relation to previous work plan:

- 1) The establishment of a day care centre has been identified by many as a basic need, primarily in order to increase the economic base of the family unit. Financing is available, resident interest is high, indigenous qualified staff have been found, but all efforts founder because of a lack of adequate space. Approximately ten buildings have been considered, but all have failed to meet the required city fire and health regulations. Negotiations are presently in process for what may be the only acceptable building in the community.
- 2) A Greek Parents and Guardians Association has been established and is currently applying for incorporation. The Association has a membership of 2,500 families, with local committees in nine schools. Each committee appoints two delegates to the Association council.

Public meetings have been held in all local schools with an average attendance of 200. The Council has met with School Board officials on several occasions and one of the results has been the appointment of a Greek-speaking teacher to act as liaison between the community and the local schools. The main aspect of this position is to interpret individual school problems to concerned parents.

The Association did much soul-searching in relation to Bill 63, and finally came out in support of the Bill. This has led to a determination to see that their children receive the best possible French, as well as English instruction. This is a major development when one considers the hostility that existed a mere six months ago. This summer the Association will work with the Project to provide a French-oriented summer recreation program.

A tutorial program has been initiated. Staffed by volunteers from the teaching profession and university students, this program is filling the role of Greek-speaking parents who are unable to assist their children with school work.

- 3) While there has been contact with many tenants, housing problems have not been indicated as a high priority. Individual rental problems have been taken to the Rental Control Board and information concerning leases and housing conditions has been widely circulated.

The development of an organization is made difficult because of the type of housing (triplex) and the fact that many tenants have a gentleman's agreement with landlords in respect to having more than one family per house.

- 4) The development of Saturday morning Greek classes has been highly successful. Approximately 300 children attend these classes and teachers are volunteers.

Greek classes played an important part in the Project identity-building, and continue to serve as a prime time for the establishment of contacts. The Project office on Saturday morning has been aptly compared to a Greek village water pump.

- 5) Important data has been gathered in regard to the medical needs of the community. The rapidly increasing rate of mental illness, the sickness due to inadequate diet adjustment, the difficulties of childbirth for women who suffered from malnutrition as children, an increasing number of criminal abortions are facts that make this a major area of concern. Data has also been collected from local hospitals that indicate they are unable to deal with the problems of the Greek immigrant.

A group of Greek professionals have worked with the Project staff to develop a concept for a community clinic. This clinic will provide the essential services and will act as a filter for the hospitals. The clinic will be controlled by the local residents.

- 6) Consumer and legal problems have been developed and promoted through articles in the bulletin "Echo"¹. These articles have been well-received by the community and the number of consumer problems brought to the Project's attention has greatly increased.

- 7) Work began with a group of residents during the late summer. The group never became effective and died from a lack of interest. This was an attempt to work with a multi-ethnic group and besides the language problem, the antagonisms and hostilities that were most apparent, played a major part in its failure.

1. See appendix 1.

- 8) Research has been initiated into employment conditions and many individual contacts have been established, however, to this point there has been no desire indicated to initiate any action. The unemployment situation and the threat employers hold over the workers make this a particularly difficult area.
- 9) Informal contact has been established with many of the regional associations. The associations contacted are most supportive of the Project and its various aspects.
- 10) A most rewarding development has been the support that has come from Greek professionals, academics and students. Many are involved in aspects of the Project, and they provide a large pool of dependable and skilled volunteers.
- 11) The information and referral service has developed to the extent that Project staff now find it difficult not to become completely engaged in casework. Relations have been established with various agencies, and professionals, and use is now being made of these resources. However, Project involvement is still required as the majority of clients are unable to speak French or English and few agencies can function in Greek.

5. Modifications:

The only modification has been in terms of attempting to work simultaneously with the various ethnic groups that reside in the area. The Project submission indicated that the objective was to develop the means to integration into the total community, and this remains so. However, experience has indicated that it is not possible to do so by attempting to unite the groups of the local area.

There are several factors that make this impossible. First, the concept of a community existing in this area, is not shared by the residents. To Canadian-born residents, the concept of community extends far beyond the limits of Mile End West. To the immigrant residents, the concept of community is based on the ethnic fact. Any program that attempts to ignore this fact, is bound to be ineffective.

Second, the vast majority of Greek immigrants are unable to communicate adequately in French or English, and so language presents a major obstacle.

Third, it must be realized that the immigrant resident is isolated and alienated from the society in which he is living. The present conditions in Quebec only tend to heighten the anxiety that is normal with cultural adjustment. This fact becomes further exaggerated by the fact that Greek immigrants now dominate the area both in terms of population

and business services. Both the French and English residents of the area, who tend to have lived there for more than one generation, are resentful of this and frequently display open hostility.

Finally, schools, welfare agencies and hospitals indicate that the Greek immigrant community is in the most desperate of situations. The illness both physical and mental, the complete ignorance of institutions and the lack of leadership and organization, combine to create a situation which is urgent but unapproachable through traditional means.

In consideration of these factors the Project concept has been modified so that resources may be directed to solving the lack of leadership and organization within the Greek immigrant community. It must be emphasized that this is a modification in terms of approach only. The basic objectives remain intact and the necessity of having the immigrant recognize and define himself in terms of the Quebec majority if he is to successfully integrate, remains basic to the Project concept.

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2. See appendix 2.

6. Work Plan for next Fiscal Year:

1. Work will continue with the Parents' Federation, strengthening the organization, assisting them isolate causes of specific problems and taking actions designed to ensure that the local schools provide an education equal to that in any other part of the city.
2. The day care centre will be put into operation and a parents association developed to take full control.
3. Funds will be sought for the medical clinic and if successful it will be in operation.
4. The monthly magazine will be developed so that it becomes self-sustaining. It will continue to function primarily as an informative paper but greater emphasis will be given to the effects provincial and national events have on the immigrant community.
5. Specific programs will be developed to promote understanding of the French majority.³
6. Consumer education programs will be developed and the possibility of developing active consumer groups explored.
7. Emphasis will be given to developing more positive action in the field of employment, working conditions, etc.
8. The information and referral service will be further developed and contacts established with more agencies and resources.
9. Efforts will be made to make available some form of legal aid.
10. The tutorial program will be further developed in cooperation with the Greek Parents and Guardians Association.
11. A group will develop recreational, programs for the children of the community.
12. The various organizations that exist within the immigrant community will develop a coordinating council.
13. Communication will be established between the people with whom the Project is working, and the Continuing Education Department of the Y.M.C.A. in order to make language classes more available to local residents.

3. See appendices 2 & 3.

The enumerated items represent specific plans for the coming year, but in conjunction with these, the Project staff will work to increase the acceptance of the Project and its goals, to develop greater unity within the community, and to take all opportunities to have the immigrant relate to the total society into which he must integrate.

APPENDIX I

The manner and the relative speed with which the Project has been accepted within the community, can be attributed to two major factors. First, the general concern and frustration with the social and economic conditions and second, the ability of the Project to integrate into the informal but effective lines of communication that exist within the community.

Communication has been the key to the Project's development and will be crucial to the eventual integration of this presently isolated and alienated ethnic group. The frequent request for basic information and the tension that was developing from inaccurate information, provided the motivation for the establishment of a monthly bulletin.

a) Objectives:

1. To make available to the Greek immigrant community news of relevant Canadian political and social developments.
2. To provide the basic knowledge that is necessary to a full comprehension of the above developments.
3. To inform the community on matters which will enable them to better adjust to this society and of the laws and institutions provided to protect individuals from exploitation and injustice.
4. To assist in the development of an effective ethnic organization.

b) Need:

The Greek immigrant community, the most isolated ethnic group in the City of Montreal, is largely ignorant of the services available to them. There is almost a complete lack of awareness of laws governing working conditions, landlord-leasee relationships, sales contracts, etc. In addition to the ignorance of specific details which effect everyday life, there is a great gulf in the understanding of affairs in the province and the nation. This state of affairs only serves to maintain the isolation and heighten the alienation of the immigrant.

Three newspapers are published in Greek. Their focus is almost completely on developments within the political scene of Greece. Very little attention is given to local developments and often the information given only serves to create alarm.

No space is devoted to providing the immigrant with the basic information so desperately required.

The ethnic press can be viewed as negative forces in the adjustments that are required to a very different society. The emphasis given to news from Greece only prolongs the isolation of the immigrant. Fortunately, the Greek press is not widely read and the political base from which they work has led to the development of a credibility gap.

c) Organization:

At present, Echo is completely controlled by the staff of the Project. One member, devotes his time to researching and translating articles, and then, the total staff team acts as the editorial board.

The staff, however, do not act in a vacuum, as the many contacts the Project has with the local residents serve as a most efficient feed-back system.

As with all other programs initiated through the Project, the objective is to have the bulletin completely in the hands of the immigrant community. With the development of a community structure, Echo will become the property of the Greek immigrant.

d) Response:

The overwhelmingly positive response to Echo has demonstrated that it is serving a major purpose. Circulation, has increased within three months from 1,500 to 3,000, and will reach 5,000 within the next few months. This increase is a result of the requests from individuals in the community. Significantly, doctors, barbers and restaurants have asked for copies and the bulletin is read and discussed in all the traditional meeting places.

The bulletin has had a profound effect on the information and referral service provided by the Project. Telephone calls have increased from 15-20 a day, to more than 100, and visits to the Project office have increased. As a result of this increased contact, many cases of discrimination and injustice are being investigated.

APPENDIX 2.

Quebec, the Immigrant, the Project:

The Project's stated objective is the integration of the ethnic group. Integration in Quebec requires an understanding of the language of the majority and identification within that cultural milieu. Therefore, it is obvious that the Project staff must take all opportunities to encourage the immigrant to accept and participate in Quebec society.

In deciding how this integration is to be achieved, two factors have to be considered. Consideration must be given to the present existing conditions in which the immigrant and the host exist, and to the desired result of integration.

First, the Greek immigrant is extremely threatened and perplexed by developments within Quebec. As stated earlier, this ethnic group is barely coping with the needed adjustments and in addition, is placed under greater tension by forces which view the immigrants only as political pawns. The working class Quebecois reject the immigrants with their different values and life-styles, and view them only as potential job usurpers. Political leaders say they are welcome in Quebec, yet they are discriminated against in such basic services as medicine. Spokesmen from the established Greek community tell them the law says they must learn French and that if they do not, they will suffer.

Under such conditions, the immigrant quite naturally becomes hostile and resentful. The tendency is to reject the present developments on a purely emotional basis and thus increase the isolation.

Second, it is obvious that integration requires more than language skills. If the only desire is to have the immigrant speak French, then, under sufficient pressure they will do so, but they will never be true citizens of Quebec, and the ghetto will become a permanent reality.

Integration that will lead to the destruction of ethnic ghettos and the full participation and contribution of the ethnic group, can be achieved. It requires a realistic view of the present conditions and the support of the ethnic group as they struggle to ensure equality and just treatment. It also requires understanding and encouragement as the immigrant develops a rational view of the host society.

In a society concerned with its future development, only the latter approach is acceptable. It is this approach that the Project

has adopted. Through stressing a rational response and playing down emotions, the staff has been successful in developing an acceptance of such changes as Bill 63. By introducing programs that expose the immigrant to the wealth of the surrounding culture, the immigrant is more likely to make the decisions that will lead to successful integration. An integration that results in participation and the contribution of his own culture and experiences.